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Russia: Intimacy Full of Intrigue

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It seems all so fortuitous. An ambassador sets off on the luxurious Red Arrow night train from Moscow to Leningrad and finds a tempting young blonde in his compartment. A young man in the military attache's office finds he has been assigned a sexy Russian cleaning lady. A diplomat gets a whispery telephone call — and the offer of companionship — while traveling in far-flung Uzbek or Kirghiz.

And yet it isn't as innocent as it seems. Behind closed doors, where Soviet agents are most artful, even intimacy is full of intrigue. The walls often have eyes — and flash bulbs.

In hotels, country hideaways and even back alleys, the KGB operates a high-stakes pornography trade befitting the shadowy worlds of Graham Greene and John Le Carre. Its currency is blackmail, not rubles, and the snare is sexual entrapment.

Reports indicating an Army major assigned to the U.S. embassy in Moscow may have been caught up in such a trap are only the latest twists in a Soviet espionage tradition that is as old as the Russian Revolution itself.

"This sort of thing has always been an essential element of espionage," said one source prominent in intelligence circles. "But the Soviets have made it an art. Their target is completely inundated by surveillance, telephone taps, everything. They know his habits better than he knows himself."

Mata Hari lives. Sometimes awkwardly, sometimes with astonishing ease, the Soviets have used the technique of sexual entrapment throughout the postwar period, luring Western diplomats, embassy guards, businessmen and journalists with women known within the KGB as "sparrows."

How often the sparrows get their worm can never be known. And though diplomatic and military ministries throughout the world warn Russia-bound personnel of the dangers that lurk in the unmade beds of Soviet relations, the West has often been embarrassed by activities

in the sparrows' nests throughout the Soviet bloc.

It happens time and again. In the late-1950s six American diplomats and 10 Marine guards were compromised in Poland, a particularly fertile area for such amorous intrigues. The agents, described in the argot of the time as "pretty Polish girls," infiltrated the Marines' sleeping quarters while the diplomats enjoyed their trysts in hideaways around Warsaw. And at the same time, a Soviet intelligence agent seduced the wife of an American foreign service officer, following and courting the woman for days.

"They're throwing girls at us by the scores everywhere behind the Iron Curtain," an American official said, "and they've also begun to work on our wives."

The Americans yielded little more than their bodies in this series of incidents; no classified information apparently was passed on. But two years later, in the celebrated liaison between Irwin C. Scarbeck and Urszula Discner, a number of classified American documents were passed to the Communist side.

Scarbeck was the second officer of the American embassy in Warsaw and Discner was the saucy 22-year-old blonde he fell for. She was a Polish agent, however, and she set him up for a raid that led to blackmail and, finally, to the transfer of classified information. Scarbeck, whose very name still causes anguish in the State Department, was convicted and sentenced to prison.

Such incidents are sprinkled through the tortuous history of East-West relations.

A very prominent Western European journalist travelling through the Soviet Union was drugged in Soviet Georgia, where a high proportion of these cases also seem to occur, and then was photographed with a woman. Once back in Moscow, colleagues advised him to inform his embassy, his editor and his wife of the incident.

In 1965, Cmdr. Anthony Courtney, one of the British Parliament's harshest critics of the Soviet Union, charged the Soviets with abusing their diplomatic privileges. Less than a month later snapshots showing him in bed with an Intourist guide he met four years earlier were circulating through the House of Commons.

There are many more. Gerda Munzinger — prostitute, petty thief and Soviet agent, according to a police report — had liaisons with at least two high Canadian officials. And a Norwegian foreign ministry official took a Russian as her lover; Soviet agents discovered the connection, taunted her and demanded security information.

Then there was the American engineer who vacationed in the Soviet Union. In a restaurant in the city of Kharkov he was ushered, innocently enough, to a table with an attractive woman. They passed a pleasant evening and agreed to meet again. The next night she led him to an outdoor bench. One thing led to another and they began to embrace.

A moment later she began yelling in Russian. The American was arrested for attempted rape and was offered a choice: a long prison sentence or cooperation with Soviet agents.

A similar choice was offered a French embassy subordinate who was lured into a tryst with a KGB agent in 1961. He would neither endure the humiliation of the photographs nor cooperate with the Soviets. He killed himself.

But perhaps the most startling incident involved Maurice Dejean, former French ambassador to Moscow. The Soviets followed him through posts in New York, London and Tokyo and knew he had an eye for a well-turned leg. Once in Moscow, KGB agents set him up with an actress, accused him of adultery and had him beaten.

"Our operation with the French ambassador was one of the greatest in the history of the KGB's inside operations," a former KGB agent told a Senate committee nearly a dozen years ago.

There was, however, no evidence Dejean parted with any classified information and French President

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